

The Importance of Consistent Data Gathering for IEP Goals

In special education, the success of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) hinges on one foundational element: **data**. The Iris Center at Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College - a national leader in best practices for special education - strongly supports this idea:

“ **The foundation for the entire IEP is based on data collected during the evaluation.** ”

- Iris Center

The quote above underscores a critical truth: if the data isn’t timely, accurate, and actionable, the entire IEP process is compromised. Yet, in practice, too many educators are forced to rely on outdated, unreliable, or burdensome methods of data collection. The result is inconsistent data that is often gathered too late to inform instruction or support timely interventions.

The Reality in Classrooms

Teachers are asked to collect meaningful IEP data in real time—while managing instruction, classroom behavior, and dozens of other tasks. This logistical challenge leads to reactive documentation, often done at the end of the week or even just before an annual IEP meeting. Because of this impossible set of pressures, teachers are forced to reconstruct data from memory; and because of the inconsistencies of human memory, we should not rely on this reconstructed data.

The Iris Center itself, despite its authority, offers best practices that highlight the limitations of the current state: To record student behavior, teachers are advised to shift pennies from one pocket to another or make tally marks on masking tape stuck to their clothing. These workarounds, while creative, emphasize a glaring problem: **we are asking teachers to collect critically important data, but not giving them the right tools to do it.** There is no time stamp on a piece of masking tape, and no attribution on a Post-it note.



The Consequences of Inconsistent Data

When IEP data are delayed or inaccurate, the consequences are significant:

Delayed Interventions

Teachers and specialists may not realize that a student is struggling until it is too late.



Reduced Instructional Effectiveness

Teachers may unknowingly deliver supports that no longer align with student needs.



Sub-optimal Progress

Students who meet their goals early in the year may be stuck working on outdated objectives.



Increased Teacher Burden

Manual data collection adds stress and contributes to burnout.



